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ABSTRACT

An information system used to monitor the performance of transfer students who enroll at the Florida State University from Florida public community colleges is described. The information system was designed to provide offices on campus with data important to the recruitment/retention process. The reports most frequently requested include retention rates by race, sex, type of student at date of entry, and date of entry. Among the data elements are the following: state of residence, degree being sought, student level, grade point average at time of admission, major, and current term hour load. The university also surveys students regarding their expectations, career aspirations, satisfaction with the university environment, and reasons for withdrawal. The survey instruments include: the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Questionnaire, a transfer student reaction survey administered approximately six weeks into the fall quarter, and a withdrawal questionnaire. Among the current uses of the information system are to provide data for reports concerning programs and policies needed to improve retention of minority students. Data on retention rates by sex and type of student at date of entry are used to demonstrate university compliance with Title IX. Additionally, the Community College Relations Office on campus and at each of the community colleges is provided a series of reports on community college transfers. This information can be used to counsel prospective transfer students. Similar reports are prepared for the deans of each school or college at the university. Previous transfer student research is briefly reviewed, and a bibliography is appended. (SW)

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An Information System For Monitoring Transfer Student Performance At A State University

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-First Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 17-20, 1981. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Mary Corcoran
University of Minnesota
(Editor, AIR Forum Publications)

Abstract

During Fall 1980 almost half of the new undergraduates enrolling at The Florida State University entered as transfer students. This pattern has existed for several years and is expected to continue. Recognizing that transfer students have needs, goals, and expectations that may differ from the native student, the Florida State University has implemented policies and programs aimed at servicing the transfer student. This paper describes an information system which provides feedback on the performance of transfer students after they enroll at the university. The information provided by the system is used to evaluate the programs and policies implemented to aid the transfer as well as identify other areas which might warrant attention.

An Information System For Monitoring Transfer Student Performance At A State University

During the 1980's, institutions of higher education will be faced with the prospect of declining enrollments. Many institutions will attempt to increase the retention rates of their students as a means to maintain stable enrollments. It is unfortunate that the threat of financial loss is necessary to encourage many institutions to review what can be done to improve the institutional - student relationship. Attrition of students is not something that has developed in the last five years. It has always been with us. It is now becoming a major concern.

In attempting to improve retention rates, the primary goal of the institution should not be merely to increase its enrollment because of financial implications, but rather to better meet student needs and to provide a more meaningful educational experience (Lenning, et al, 1980). The methods used to increase retention rates may vary based on the type of student involved, e.g. native, transfer, graduate level, since the needs of these groups often vary one from another. An examination of retention rates at Florida State University revealed the need for improvement in retention efforts aimed at the transfer student.

This paper describes an information system which is used to monitor the performance of transfer students who enroll at the Florida State University from Florida public community colleges. Information which is vital to the recruitment and retention of transfer students is provided to offices on campus. This system represents the coordinated efforts of the Budget and Analysis Department, the Office of Community

College Relations, and the Division of Student Affairs. The paper also discusses the importance of institutions conducting studies of their transfer students and reviews some of the findings of previous transfer student research.

Why Study the Transfer Student ?

It is not unusual for an institution to enroll as many as half of its new students each year as transfers from other institutions (Sandeen, 1976). During Fall 1980, of the 5,092 undergraduates entering Florida State University, over 49 percent were transfers, and of these over two-thirds were from in-state public community colleges.

The community college enrollment in Florida is projected to rise over the next five years. At the same time, the Florida Board of Regents is considering imposing enrollment limits at the lower levels of the State Universities. This conceivably could push even more students into the community colleges for the first two years of study. With the prospect of more and more students entering as transfers, we feel it is critical to learn more about their needs, goals, and expectations and how these factors ultimately effect their performance.

Some state universities have relatively open admissions standards with regard to transfer students, while having highly selective admissions standards for freshmen (Knoell, 1965). In Florida, students transferring with an AA degree are guaranteed admission to the State University System. Admission to a particular program within the institution is not guaranteed, however.

In line with the proposed lower level enrollment limitations, minimum admission requirements for freshmen are being raised. This may put a number of transfer students at an even greater disadvantage in terms of competing academically with native students. Careful monitoring of the transfer student's performance during his stay at the institution should provide information which can be used to increase chances that the student will successfully achieve his goals.

All or most junior college students could be successful in achieving their degree goals after transfer if they would select a senior institution and major field appropriate to their past achievements (Knoell, 1965). Senior institutions should provide feedback to the community college on transfer student performance. In addition, student profiles, prepared and distributed by the four-year institution, can assist prospective transfers in understanding institutional differences and selecting the appropriate college (Willingham, 1972). Once reliable data are available on a regular basis, two-year and four-year institutions are in a much better position to counsel students toward the college where they have the best chance for success.

Review of Transfer Student Research

The Research Division of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators developed a program in 1971 to provide institutions with information about transfer students, the need for effective programs for them, and recommendations for specific action. They hoped that if this type of information were made available, administrators would be more likely to initiate action on their own campuses for transfer students (Sandeen, 1976). The result of this program was a monograph, The Transfer Student by Art Sandeen. The publication was an effort to update and consolidate the research, problems, and needs of transfer students. In his work, Sandeen reviews the findings of Alexander Astin, Patricia Cross, Dorothy Knoell, Leland L. Medsker, among others. Some of the findings he noted include:

(1) Academic performance of transfer students, as measured by traditional methods, is lower than that of native students.

(2) Generally speaking, students who transfer to four-year institutions from the community college have lower educational aspirations than native students.

(3) Transfer students usually spend much less time in employment after transfer than before. In some instances, this can lead to financial difficulty and subsequent withdrawal by the student.

(4) Community college students tend to be older.

(5) A larger portion are part-time.

(6) Transfer students may identify with the four-year institution less strongly than native students, may become less involved in student life and activities and may feel less loyalty after graduation.

(7) There is a tendency for first term grades of transfer students to drop below their cumulative community college average.

(8) Academic reputation is the most common reason for the selection of a University, whereas low cost and closeness to home frequently are the main reasons given for attending a community college.

While performance of transfer students may vary greatly from one institution to another, these general findings do serve as a starting point for assessing transfer student performance.

Transfer Student Information System

At Florida State University an information system was designed to provide offices with data to use in the recruitment/retention process. Based on results of previous studies, transfer students were of particular interest. Demographic data for the Transfer Student Information System are collected from files already in existence at the University. Admissions data and enrollment information are combined on a file developed and maintained by the Budget and Analysis Department. This file can be used, for example, to produce reports on retention rates for select populations of students. The group is determined using any of the variables on the file. The reports most frequently requested include retention rates by race, sex, type of student at date of entry, and date of entry.

The following elements are included on the file:

(1) Social Security Number

(2) Name

(3) Birth Year

(4) Sex

(5) Race

(6) State of Residence at Time of Admission

(7) Degree Being Sought

(8) Type of Student at Date of Entry

- (a) First-Time-In-College
- (b) Junior College Transfer
- (c) Other Undergraduate Transfer
- (d) Graduate Student
- (e) Law Student

(9) GPA at Time of Admission

(10) Highest Degree at Time of Admission

(11) Admission Test Score

Note: Items (1) through (11) are collected at the time the student is admitted to the University.

(12) Current Term Indicator

(13) Major

(14) Current Term Hour Load

(15) Current Term Classification

- (a) Freshman
- (b) Sophomore
- (c) Junior
- (d) Senior
- (e) Graduate
- (f) Post-High School Non-Degree Seeking
- (g) Post-Baccalaureate Non-Degree Seeking
- (h) Temporary Graduate
- (i) Transient

(16) Termination Code

(17) Degree Granted

(18) Cumulative GPA

Note: Items (12) through (18) are collected each time the student enrolls.

In order to obtain additional information which might be helpful in assessing transfer student performance, the University surveys students regarding their expectations, career aspirations, satisfaction with the University environment, and reasons for withdrawal. The information provided by these surveys coupled with the demographic data from the Retention System should provide better insight regarding transfer students. The survey instruments include:

(1) The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Questionnaire - This questionnaire is administered to new freshmen and transfer students during orientation. Transfer students are strongly encouraged to participate in orientation. The Orientation Office, Community College Relations Office, and various academic deans work closely to develop orientation programs which will be of special interest and benefit to the transfer student. Participation has been high.

(2) Transfer Student Reaction Survey - Approximately six weeks into the Fall Quarter 1980, new transfer students were sent a questionnaire surveying their educational goals, career aspirations, overall use of, and satisfaction with, university services. In addition, students were asked about their current employment status, financial status, choice of residence, and level of encouragement they receive regarding their education. The response rate (out of 2,300 students surveyed) was approximately 25 percent.

(3) Withdrawal Questionnaire - Students formally withdrawing from the University usually have an exit interview with the Withdrawal Office. At that time, they are

asked to complete a brief questionnaire indicating their reasons for withdrawal. The response rate has been extremely high.

Current Uses

Reports produced from the Retention System have wide distribution internally. The EEO Advisory Committee is provided reports on retention rates by race and type of student at date of entry. The data from these reports are used to develop programs and policies to improve retention of minority students. These reports are also used to comply with federal reporting requirements of the Office of Civil Rights. Data on retention rates by sex and type of student at date of entry are provided the Title IX Review Committee. These reports are used to demonstrate University compliance with Title IX.

The Community College Relations Office is provided a series of reports on community college transfers. For each community college in the state, reports are produced on students transferring from that institution. The reports contain information on:

(1) GPA at time of transfer

(2) Cumulative GPA at FSU (for each quarter subsequent to admission)

(3) Distribution of majors

(4) Degrees Received

Copies of these reports are also provided for distribution to each of the community colleges. The information from these reports can be used to counsel prospective transfer students about what to expect in terms of potential GPA, time to completion of degrees, and success in particular programs.

Similar reports are prepared for the deans of each school or college at the University. The deans can easily ascertain which community colleges send them the most transfers. The GPA reports can be used to determine differentials between GPA at the community college and the University and identify groups of students who may need special services once they reach the University.

Potential Uses

In Fall 1981, the University will survey transfer students who entered the Florida State University during Fall 1980 but failed to return. The responses to this survey will be combined with the data from the other surveys and the Retention System to develop an Early Warning Program to identify transfer students who may be prone to "dropping out". Information will be distributed to appropriate offices on campus to be used in developing programs and policies to assist the transfer student during his stay at the University.

Conclusion

The State of Florida has taken steps to improve articulation between community colleges and universities in the state. Access to the state universities is provided all community college transfers with an AA degree. A common course numbering system has been established to standardize evaluation of transfer credit. Effective Fall 1981, all institutions will be on a common academic calendar to facilitate transfer from the community colleges to the state universities. The universities are now in the process of converting from a quarter system to a semester system.

The Florida State University has likewise taken steps to ease the transition from community college to university. A Community College Relations Office has been established as a liason between the University and the community colleges. Through efforts of this office and the various academic deans, orientation programs have been developed that are directed strictly to the transfer student and his needs. A Transfer Student Retention Program has also been established.

The information system described in this paper provides feedback on the performance of transfer students. It serves as a mechanism to evaluate these programs and policies as well as to identify other areas which might warrant attention. The goal is to improve the educational experience of the transfer student at Florida State University and in doing so, increase the likelihood of the student remaining at the institution until he has completed his program. If this goal is achieved, retention rates will increase.

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